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CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Written statement* submitted by the Reporters sans frontières international, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 January 2002]

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*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ISRAEL: Case study of 45 journalists injured by bullets from September 2000

The fifteen months of violence between the Israeli army and the Palestinians has taken a heavy toll: over one thousand deaths (roughly 800 Palestinians and 200 Israelis). In this type of context, journalists' working conditions are very difficult. Since the beginning of the second Intifada on 29 September 2000, 45 cases of journalists injured by bullets have been recorded by Reporters Sans Frontières. In the majority of cases the organisation has imputed the responsibility to the Israeli army and has asked it to expedite its inquiries. In mid-December 2001 the Israeli defence minister informed RSF of the results of its inquiries. Only nine cases of journalists were mentioned in the document which exonerated Tsahal, with one exception.

Palestinian journalists, who constitute the majority of those injured, have been finding it increasingly difficult to move about between the different territories. At the end of the year the Israeli authorities considered no longer renewing the press cards of Palestinian correspondents of the foreign press, and rather issuing them with "orange" cards which would limit their movements even more. At the same time, Tel Aviv made public its plan to create an Arabic television channel to counter the "propaganda" of Arab and especially Palestinian media.

Throughout the year a part of the Israeli press, despite its professionalism, has on occasion acted as an army mouthpiece, using the same vocabulary as Tsahal.

Eight journalists injured by gunshot

On 9 February 2001 **Laurent van der Stockt**, photographer with *Gamma*, was covering demonstrations by Palestinian youths in Ramallah when he was hit in the knee by a real bullet. The youths were throwing stones at the soldiers who retaliated with rubber-covered bullets and tear gas. The photographer was taken to a Jerusalem hospital and then repatriated to France. He was confined to bed for three months and is still suffering from serious after-effects.

On the same day and in the same place, **Rebhi Ahmad Mohammed al-Kobari**, a Palestinian cameraman working for the Palestinian television channel *al-Sharq* in Ramallah, was injured in the left knee by shrapnel after the Israeli army opened fire on demonstrators. Apart from his camera, the journalist was wearing a cap clearly marked "TV".

On 23 March **Ahmed Zaki**, Palestinian correspondent for *Oman Satellite Television*, was hit in the knee by an unidentified projectile while covering clashes at the entry to Ramallah.

On 14 April **Zakaria Abu Harbeid**, journalist with the local news agency *Ramatan*, was wounded at Khan Younis in Gaza while taking photos of Israeli soldiers shooting at Palestinians. He was hit in the hand and hospitalised for several days.

On 20 April **Laïla Odeh**, Jerusalem correspondent for the United Arab Emirates channel *Abou Dhabi TV*, was interviewing people whose houses had been destroyed by Israeli raids, in the Rafah area. As the journalist and his crew were about to leave, Israeli soldiers shot in their direction. The journalist was hit in the thigh by a real bullet and taken to the Al Shifa hospital in Gaza. According to him, the soldiers deliberately aimed at him. The report made public on 18 December by the Israeli army indicated that an additional "action-inquiry" may be launched.

On 15 May **Bertrand Aguirre**, correspondent for the French channel *TF1*, was injured while covering clashes between the Israeli army and Palestinian demonstrators in Ramallah. A bullet hit the journalist's bullet-proof jacket and he was taken to the Ramallah hospital to be examined. In September the journalist was informed that the inquiry had been closed. To justify this decision, Fran Shangar, director of the police internal affairs bureau, explained: "After examining the file, I have decided not to prosecute the policeman due to a lack of evidence". Yet three different television teams all filmed the scene. The films clearly show an Israeli border guard get out of his vehicle, calmly take aim and, with his cigarette between his lips, open fire with real bullets, at a distance of about 100 meters.

On 6 July, **Lu'ay Abu-Haikal** was hit by a rubber-coated bullet while covering clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian demonstrators in Hebron. He was treated at the Hebron hospital.

Six journalists arrested

On 24 April 2001 in Nablus, **Ruba Al-Najar**, journalist, **Jaghoub Jaghoub**, cameraman, **Bilal Aburish**, production assistant and **Samir Abid Rabbo**, sound engineer, all with the Palestinian public channel *Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC)*, were arrested by Israeli soldiers while doing a report. An officer accused them of filming Israeli military positions and vehicles. After taking the journalists to the Karne Shermon colony, the soldiers blindfolded them and their driver, Hussein Al Gharnaoui, and interrogated them. After eight hours in detention, Ruba Al-Najar, Jaghoub Jaghoub, Bilal Aburish and Samir Abid Rabbo were released. Their driver was kept in detention under the pretext that he was involved in "hostile activities".

On 30 October **Maurizio Giuliano**, freelance journalist, crossed the Allenby bridge between Jordan and the Occupied Territories. He was arrested at the Israeli checkpoint and manhandled by a policeman. He was then detained for several hours on the Jordanian side.

Fourteen journalists assaulted

Hossam Abou Alan, photographer for *Agence France-Presse*, **Mazen Dana**, cameraman with *Reuters*, and **Nael Shiyoukhi**, boom operator for the same agency, were covering the Jewish carnival on 10 March 2001 in Hebron when they were set on by Jewish settlers.

On 29 July, during clashes on Temple Mount, nine journalists, **Nasser Atta** (*ABC News*), **Rachid Safadi** (*Al Jazira*), **Atta Awassat** (*Yedihot Aharonot*), **Fatem Awalan** (*Nile TV*), **Gevara Bouderi** (*Al Jazira*), **Mahfuz Abu Turk** (freelance journalist working mainly for *Reuters*), **Muna Qawasmi** (*Al Ayyam*), **Amar Awad** (*Reuters*) and **Nasser Abdel Jawad** (cameraman), found themselves facing hundreds of policemen after the demonstrators had fled. The police set on them with truncheons. Atta Awassat was hit with the butt of a rifle.

On 13 August **Tarek Abdel Jaber** and **Abdel Nasser Abdoun**, respectively journalist and cameraman for Egyptian state television, were attacked by an Israeli soldier at the Qalandia bridge. The soldier hit Abdel Nasser Abdoun in the face and then in the groin. The journalist was taken to the Makased hospital in Jerusalem. The Israeli soldier was sentenced to 21 days in jail and prohibited from having command.

Pressure and obstruction

On 8 March 2001 in Gaza, **Christine Hauser**, **Ahmed Bahadou** and **Suhaib Salem**, journalists with *Reuters*, were shot at by Tsahal soldiers. The three journalists wanted to take photos and film Israeli military equipment in Netzarim. The spokesperson of the Israeli army, Olivier Rafowicz, commented that "due to the very tense situation in Gaza, civilians are not allowed near Israeli defence force posts".

In early May the head of the army education department, General Eliezer Stern, ordered the suspension of the Israeli army weekly for several weeks. An article published in the most recent issue had described a homosexual reserve colonel.

On 1 August a group of Palestinian journalists was stopped at a roadblock at the entrance to Nablus. The next day an *ANN (Arab News Network)* crew was held up for two hours at the same roadblock. **Mohamad Al-Sayed**, journalist, **Ahmed Al-Asi**, cameraman, and their driver were insulted after Mohamad Al-Sayed (an Israeli Arab) refused to interpret for the Israeli soldiers.

The armoured car of **Elizabeth Dalziel** of *Associated Press* was hit by bullets on 5 October during a shootout between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians in Hebron. A bullet hit the windscreen of the

vehicle which was clearly marked "TV" and "Press". As the journalist tried to flee, at least five other bullets hit her car, with one puncturing a tyre. The Israeli army announced the next day that it was investigating the origin of the shots. In early 2002 the results of the inquiry have still not been made public.

In the autumn, **Ziad Abou Ziad**, Palestinian member of parliament and director of the magazine *Palestine–Israel Journal* (edited jointly by Israelis and Palestinians) was prevented from going to Jerusalem where the head office of his magazine is situated.

On 13 December the Israeli army destroyed the Palestinian radio and television transmission centre in Ramallah by dynamiting the main broadcasting antenna. In the evening of 12 December Palestinian radio and television were already out of order due to bombings. These official media were consequently forced to use the antennae of privately-owned media to broadcast their programmes.

On 18 December the Israeli government press office (GPO) reported its intention not to renew the press cards of Palestinian journalists working for foreign media. Instead they are to be issued with a "special assistant" orange card which will be valid only for the territories and will not automatically allow them access to Israel. The Israeli authorities justified this measure by stating that Palestinian journalists "disseminate propaganda and do not meet journalistic standards for balanced coverage". According to the GPO, 500-600 Palestinian journalists currently have a press card.